

Veterans'

Summer 2004

# HealthMatters

The Wellness Magazine  
from the VA  
Sierra Pacific Network

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**CARES  
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Former  
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# Network

## Highlights

### *The Heart of the Matter*

Here's the bad news...cardiovascular disease (CVD) continues to be the leading cause of death in the United States. About one million Americans die each year from CVD. And more than 64 million Americans have one or more forms of CVD, including high blood pressure, coronary heart disease (e.g., heart attack, chest pains or angina) and stroke.

But here's the good news...prevention, diagnosis and treatment of CVD are getting better and better. Efforts to control risk factors for CVD, such as smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes, and improvements in treatment are working. The death rate of CVD (i.e., the number of deaths per 100,000 people) has declined by nearly 10% since 1990.

VA is also working hard to address this major health problem. We have the best screening and preventive health programs in the country. As examples, veterans are checked for high blood pressure or high cholesterol and, if they smoke, offered assistance to stop smoking.

We have also replaced and added cardiac catheterization (cath) labs—which are used to diagnose and treat coronary artery disease—in many locations across the country. In this Network, we recently opened a cardiac cath lab in Sacramento and have plans to open one in Reno later this year. We will also replace the cardiac cath lab in Palo Alto and add a second one in San Francisco.

Finally, we have revised our procedures for evaluating and treating veterans with possible heart attacks and streamlining our referral process.

I hope you will read and enjoy the following articles about efforts to improve cardiac care at your medical centers. More importantly, I encourage you to do what you can to reduce the risk of CVD. We will work with you to help you be "heart healthy."

Robert L. Wiebe, M.D., M.B.A.  
Director, VA Sierra Pacific Network

#### **San Francisco VA Medical Center (SfVAMC): In the forefront for cardiac and cancer care**

Heart disease is a major health problem for the veteran population, and SfVAMC is taking important steps to improve cardiac care. Coronary artery disease (obstruction of the arteries supplying blood to the heart) is the most common form of heart disease and a heart attack (myocardial infarction) is its most serious consequence. For many patients, immediate or early heart catheterization and, where indicated, coronary artery angioplasty or stenting, are the most effective interventions. The SfVAMC Cardiology Section is participating in a national VA effort to improve

the care of patients with myocardial infarction. As part of this effort, SfVAMC will build a second cardiac catheterization lab and recruit an additional interventional cardiologist. A high priority is to accept transfer of veterans from other VA facilities and community hospitals who need cardiac catheterization or coronary revascularization.

SfVAMC's cancer program is approved by the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer and diagnoses approximately 500 new cancer cases annually. The care is multidis-

ciplinary with careful collaborative planning of treatment by a team of oncology-trained physicians, nurses and allied health professionals. The SfVAMC cancer program is affiliated with the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) Cancer Center, the only National Cancer Institute designated Comprehensive Cancer Center in northern California. The SfVAMC/UCSF collaboration provides veterans access to more than 50 clinical trials, many of which feature innovative strategies and drugs for a wide range of cancer types.

*Veterans' HealthMatters is intended to provide supplemental health information. Individuals should consult their primary care provider before pursuing any treatment alternatives. You may visit our web site at the following address: [www.visn21.med.va.gov](http://www.visn21.med.va.gov).*



## **VA Central California Health Care System (VACCHCS): Using research to improve treatments**

VACCHCS's cardiology program is led by one of the nation's top cardiologists, Dr. Prakash C. Deedwania. Many complex conditions are treated under this program, such as advanced heart failure; life threatening rhythm problems; stable coronary disease; complications after heart attacks; and patients with problematic cholesterol and high blood pressure. Our research program is changing and reshaping many treatments

currently used to detect and treat heart disease. Four recent major studies provide veterans with access to information on new therapies and medicines not yet available to the general public.

Our oncology program has more than 900 veterans in its registry and 300 new patients were diagnosed and treated last year. The program has many outstanding

characteristics to provide state-of-the-art therapies, which includes a concerted effort to incorporate outpatient infusion pump therapy, allowing veterans to be with family during treatment. In addition, there is an aggressive effort to provide veterans with the latest in FDA approved cancer treatments, often within days of final approval.

## **VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System (VASNHCS): Improving your heart health**

In an ongoing effort to improve cardiac services to veterans, VASNHCS eagerly anticipates the opening of our new cardiac catheterization lab. The new cath lab will greatly improve access to diagnostic cardiac care and significantly reduce the number of veterans traveling to VAPAHCS and SFBVAMC for cardiac care. The cath lab is under construction and recruitment of an interventional cardiologist and other lab staff is underway. Other efforts to improve cardiac care to veterans include increased timeliness of diagnosis and treatment of heart attacks in the emergency room and improved preventive health for patients with high risk for cardiac disease.

## **VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS): In myocardial infarction, prompt intervention saves lives**

VAPAHCS provides around-the-clock coverage for heart attacks. Patients immediately are brought to the cardiac catheterization laboratory for percutaneous coronary intervention and stenting of their diseased coronary arteries. With the aging of our population and the growing community awareness, the numbers of patients requiring coronary care has dramatically increased during the past several years. To help meet this need, VAPAHCS is in the process of constructing a second cardiac catheterization laboratory and will renovate the current laboratory.

Because of the intensive therapies that have been developed to fight coronary artery disease, increasing numbers of patients are surviving their heart attacks, but are then faced with the prospect of dangerous arrhythmias and heart failure. VAPAHCS has developed a strong cardiac electrophysiology program and an intensive program for the management of advanced heart failure, including cardiac transplantation. Expansion of the current clinical laboratory facilities allows for enhanced treatment of these conditions, including implantation of programmable devices that help treat life-threatening heart conditions.

## **VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS): New systems aid in cardiac and cancer care**

A new clinician-centered, population-based disease management tool has been created by VAPIHCS staff and the Pacific Telehealth & Technology Hui that enhances methods of treating heart disease. It offers clinicians a web-based view into the Health Information System Database to assist in managing heart disease, as well as other applications. The Hui, a Hawaiian word for partnership, was formed as a joint venture between the U.S. Army's Pacific Regional Medical Command, TAMC and VAPIHCS.

Clinical reminders improve our compliance with recognized screening recommendations concerning cancer. A computer software database program, that assists physicians in tracking their patients' health progress, is slated to have a colorectal cancer-screening module in the future. This allows the ability to quickly identify those veterans in need of screening studies. Early screening helps detect cancers at a treatable stage.

## **VA Northern California Health Care System (VANCHCS): Improving care for our nation's heroes**

Our Cardiac Care Program took a quantum leap last August with the opening of a new cardiac and vascular catheterization laboratory at the Sacramento VA Medical Center (SVAMC), where our cardiologists perform diagnostic studies of coronary arteries, hemodynamic studies of valve abnormalities, congestive heart failure and adult congenital disease. We perform a variety of cardiac procedures including trans-echocardiography, pacemaker insertion and follow-up, and non-invasive testing. Our vascular surgeons are often able to repair abnormalities in the aorta and other large blood vessels without surgery. As a partner with the University of California Davis (UCD), our faculty are involved in basic and clinical research, and are an integral part of the UCD Cardiology Fellowship training program.

Our Hematology Oncology Program is comprised of a team of cancer specialists including medical oncologists, surgeons, oncology-certified nurse specialists, and chemotherapy pharmacists who provide a full spectrum of oncologic care. Radiation oncology services are available through the UCD Cancer Center, Sacramento and David Grant Medical Center at Travis Air Force Base, Fairfield. In addition, we are focusing efforts in the area of cancer research in order to enhance our ability to provide cutting-edge cancer care to our veterans.

# VA Secretary Announces CARES Decision

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi announced on May 7 details of a comprehensive plan to modernize the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system. The investment of nearly \$1 billion annually for several years is the result of a major three-year review of the medical system serving America's 25 million veterans.

The three-year review is called CARES, which stands for Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services. It is a landmark study to modernize and improve the VA's health care system. Among the elements of the Secretary's CARES decision are more than 150 new Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), potential creation of four new - and expansion of five existing - spinal cord injury centers, two new rehabilitation centers for the blind, and expansions throughout VA's healthcare system that will enhance veterans' access to VA care.

"These changes will provide greater access to care for veterans," said Secretary Principi. "By strengthening our network of outpatient clinics, we will bring a greater quality of care closer to where most veterans live."

Secretary Principi noted that about 80 percent of the health care provided by VA is outpatient care. The plan would allow the department to provide more of the outpatient care veterans want and use, while building upon VA's expertise in providing highly specialized inpatient care, he explained.

be used to enhance services in the communities where health care is provided.

"CARES modernizes VA's 74-year old health care system," said Principi. "I want to emphasize that no veteran will lose health care as a result of CARES, nor will there be any gaps in their health care services."

*"...we will bring a greater quality of care closer to where most veterans live."*

In July 1999, a General Accounting Office (GAO) study found that VA was diverting a million dollars a day – or \$3.6 billion during a decade – from veterans' health care to maintenance on unneeded or unused facilities. The average age of VA's more than 4,900 buildings is more than 50 years, and the need to reduce vacant space and unneeded buildings has been the focus of several reports by the GAO.

This approach to facility management means the dollars once used on old and vacant buildings can

The CARES plan was reviewed by an independent commission, which received more than 212,000 comments and held 81 site visits to VA and Department of Defense (DoD) medical facilities and state homes. There were also 38 public hearings and 10 formal meetings. The commission submitted its recommendations to Secretary Principi in mid-February.

The Secretary's report on CARES can be viewed in its entirety on VA's Web site at [www.va.gov/CARES](http://www.va.gov/CARES).

## CARES Changes

### Changes for Central and Northern California Health Care Facilities (Fresno, Palo Alto, Sacramento/Martinez, San Francisco):

- ❑ Open new CBOCs in San Mateo county and East Bay;
- ❑ Improve patient and employee safety by correcting seismic and life safety deficiencies at the Palo Alto, San Francisco, Menlo Park and Fresno facilities;
- ❑ Transfer sub-acute care beds from the Livermore Division to the VA Palo Alto Division;
- ❑ Construct a new freestanding nursing home care unit for Livermore area veterans and expand the Central Valley outpatient clinic;
- ❑ Maintain the San Francisco VA Medical Center and VA Palo Alto Health Care System as separate tertiary care facilities but continue to consolidate clinical and administrative services; and
- ❑ Pursue collaboration with the DoD. Expand sharing opportunities with David Grant Medical Center at Travis Air Force Base to include a joint dialysis unit, and develop a joint outpatient clinic with the Army in Monterey.

### Changes for VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System (Reno):

- ❑ Expand services at the Reno VA Medical Center and enhance telemedicine services between the Reno and VA Palo Alto Health Care System and San Francisco VA Medical Center; and
- ❑ Open a new CBOC in Fallon.

### Changes for VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (Honolulu):

- ❑ Open a new CBOC in American Samoa that supports VA/DoD sharing; and
- ❑ Continue collaborative work with Tripler Army Medical Center, and seek new VA/DoD sharing opportunities in American Samoa and Guam.

**The CARES Plan does not preclude the VA Sierra Pacific Network from considering CBOCs in other locations.**



# VA SEEKS FORMER POWs FOR POSSIBLE BENEFIT AWARDS

**T**he Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is asking former prisoners of war (POWs) not currently using VA benefits to contact VA to find out if they may be eligible for disability compensation and other services. More than 23,000 former POWs already receive compensation from VA.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi said VA has expanded policies to cover increasing numbers of former POWs as new

illnesses have been found related to captivity. The administration currently is pressing to get even more compensation and medical care benefits for former POWs.

“These veterans sacrificed for their country in time of war, and it’s the nation’s turn to serve them, to help them determine if they are entitled to compensation, health care or other services,” Principi said.

Nine out of ten former POWs are veterans of World War II, and their service predates the use of Social Security numbers as a military “service number.” That, coupled with the decades that have elapsed since their service, makes it difficult for VA to track down those who have not opened a file with VA in recent years.

The most recent expansion of VA benefits for former POWs is a regulation that added cirrhosis of the

liver to the list of diseases to which entitlement to disability compensation is presumed in former POWs.

Similar policies making it easier for former POWs to obtain compensation have been enacted for POWs detained for 30 days or more who develop specific illnesses.

Former POWs have a special eligibility for enrollment in VA medical care and are exempt from making copayments for inpatient and outpatient medical care. They have the same copay rules as other veterans for medications and for extended care. Free dental treatment for any dental condition is available to former POWs held for more than 90 days.

More information about VA services for former POWs is available at [www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/POW/](http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/POW/).

FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
YOU MAY CONTACT THE  
EX-POW COORDINATOR AT THE  
FOLLOWING FACILITIES:

**VA CENTRAL CALIFORNIA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM, FRESNO**

Michael Ozburn  
(559) 225-6100 ext. 6970

**VA NORTHERN CALIFORNIA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM, SACRAMENTO/MARTINEZ**

Dr. Linda Sidwell  
(916) 561-7453

**VA PACIFIC ISLANDS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM, HONOLULU**

JoAnn Connolly  
(808) 433-0039

**VA PALO ALTO HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

Judy Moltzen  
(650) 493-5000 ext. 27160

**SAN FRANCISCO VA MEDICAL CENTER**

Dr. John Dekutoski  
(415) 221-4810, ext. 2735

**VA SIERRA NEVADA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM, RENO**

Ralph Levenberg  
(775) 328-1463

**MANILA OUTPATIENT CLINIC, PHILIPPINES**

Dr. Vicente Gatilao  
(623) 833-4566 ext. 4504

## AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR

	Captured and Interned	Died While POW	Returned to U.S. Military Control	Refused to Return	Alive at end of 2003*
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>142,219</b>	<b>16,984</b>	<b>125,214</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>35,900</b>
<b>WW I</b>	4,120	147	3,973	–	–
<b>WW II</b>	130,201	14,072	116,129	–	33,050
<b>Korean</b>	7,140	2,701	4,418	21	2,150
<b>Vietnam</b>	725	64	661	–	591
<b>Gulf War</b>	21	–	21	–	21
<b>Somalia</b>	1	–	1	–	1
<b>Kosovo</b>	3	–	3	–	3
<b>Iraq</b>	8	–	8	–	8

\*Note: The estimate of the number alive from World War II and the Korean War at the end of 2003 is based on mortality estimates from VA’s Office of the Actuary that are rounded to the nearest 50. Because of the advanced age of World War I veterans, estimates of those alive would be too unreliable to report.



# Healthy Balance



**A**s people grow older, they may have difficulty with their balance. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one-third of adults age 65 years and older fall each year. Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of injury deaths.

Having good balance means being able to control and maintain your body's position, whether you are moving or remaining still. Good balance is important to help you get around, stay independent, and carry out daily activities.

## What affects balance?

There are a number of factors that can negatively affect a person's balance. Certain medications, illnesses, conditions, and substances can all affect one's balance. Even what you wear can have an effect. The key is to be aware of these effects and make adjustments whenever possible.

Disturbances of the inner ear are the cause of many balance problems. Labyrinthitis is an infection or inflammation of the inner ear causing dizziness and loss of balance. The labyrinth is the organ in your inner ear that helps you maintain your balance. Meniere's disease is a balance disorder that causes a person to experience:

- ⚖️ vertigo, the feeling that you or the things around you are spinning,

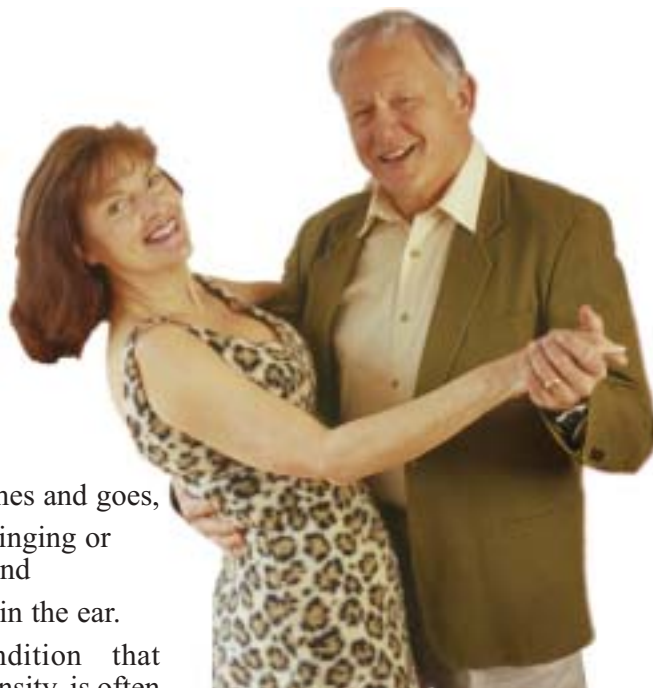
- ⚖️ hearing loss that comes and goes,
- ⚖️ tinnitus, which is a ringing or roaring in the ears, and
- ⚖️ a feeling of fullness in the ear.

Osteoporosis, a condition that causes decreased bone density, is often the culprit when a minor fall, strain or bump results in a major fracture. Your balance may also be affected by:

- ⚖️ Bifocals or trifocals – if you look down without lowering your head, your depth perception may be altered
- ⚖️ Alcoholic beverages
- ⚖️ Blood pressure pills
- ⚖️ Heart medicines
- ⚖️ Diuretics (water pills)
- ⚖️ Muscle relaxants
- ⚖️ Antidepressants
- ⚖️ Sedatives
- ⚖️ Anitconvulsants
- ⚖️ Allergy and cold medications, such as antihistamines
- ⚖️ Partial or full paralysis due to stroke
- ⚖️ Alzheimer's
- ⚖️ Parkinson's
- ⚖️ Muscle weakness and instability
- ⚖️ High-heeled shoes or shoes with uneven or rounded soles that cause you to rock forward.

## Treating balance problems

There are lots of ways you can work to maintain and improve your sense of balance. If any of the factors listed above apply to you, make adjustments that can be done safely and without



aggravating an ongoing condition. Talk to your physician about any medications that may be making you dizzy, weak or faint.

There are generally two sets of things you can do to help yourself keep from falling. One set consists of changes you can make in your environment. The other set are changes you can make for yourself.

Basic things in the environment include adequate lighting. Night lights, for instance, can help since part of maintaining your balance relies on visual cues. It makes sense to have things well lit so you can see where you are.

Handholds are another useful tool. A few strategically located handrails can offer assistance when needed. Also, remove any loose rugs and make sure that any carpeting is firmly fixed to the floor.

And then there's exercise and conditioning. Decreased muscle mass, especially in the lower legs, can greatly reduce strength and stability. Certain kinds of low impact exercise, slow range of motion and strength training such as tai chi and yoga, can help you gently build muscle strength. Just a little exercise can help improve your sense of stability, alertness and balance for a long time.

Q R S T U  
N O P Q R  
J K L M N  
**V S O**



## **s Aid Veterans with Assistance & Representation**

**V**eterans Service Organizations (VSOs) are partners with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in communicating and coordinating outreach activities to inform veterans and the public of VA benefits and services. The major VSOs are, for the most part, private non-profit membership organizations that assist veterans and represent their interest in governmental matters and before the general public.

Some VSOs are chartered, which means they are federally chartered and/or recognized or approved by the VA Secretary for purposes of preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims under laws

administered by the VA. The most recognized VSOs are AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, The American Legion, and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

These groups all elect new national commanders each year, but maintain permanent professional staffs, headed by executive directors, at their Washington, D.C., offices. Each organization has a structure of local offices throughout the country, including locations at VA regional offices and medical centers. VSO staffs frequently serve as official representatives of veterans in their claims before the VA.

The combined weight of the VSOs is a powerful lobby on Capitol Hill

representing a strong pro-active force for veterans' health benefits and medical care. VA has a long history of consulting with the VSOs on major issues, and VSO officials are regularly called on to testify at congressional hearings on veterans' issues.

All these organizations are also an important source of volunteer manpower at VA medical centers. VSO volunteers contribute to the welfare of patients in many ways, including providing transportation to clinic appointments, contributing comfort items and purchasing televisions for patient rooms and clinic waiting areas.

The Voluntary Service Chief at VA medical centers is typically the principal representative, staff advisor and point of contact with VSOs for the Director. The Director is responsible for assuring that effective interactions are developed and maintained between designated VSOs and medical center representatives.

For more information on chartered and non-chartered veterans service organizations, please refer to the following web site [www1.va.gov/vso](http://www1.va.gov/vso).

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## VA MEDICAL CENTER SAN FRANCISCO

4150 Clement Street  
San Francisco, CA 94121-1598  
(415) 221-4810

### VA EUREKA OPC

714 F Street  
Eureka, CA 95501  
(707) 442-5335

### VA SANTA ROSA OPC

3315 Chanate Road  
Santa Rosa, CA 95404  
(707) 570-3855

### VA 13TH & MISSION CLINIC

205 13th Street, Suite 2150  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
(415) 551-7300

### VA UKIAH OPC

630 Kings Court  
Ukiah, CA 95482  
(707) 468-7700

## VA PALO ALTO HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

3801 Miranda Avenue  
Palo Alto, CA 94304-1290  
(650) 493-5000

### VA MENLO PARK DIVISION

795 Willow Road  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
(650) 493-5000

### VA LIVERMORE DIVISION

4951 Arroyo Road  
Livermore, CA 94550  
(925) 373-4700

### VA CAPITOLA OPC

1350 N. 41st Street, Suite 102  
Capitola, CA 95010  
(831) 464-5519

### VA STOCKTON OPC

500 W. Hospital Road  
Stockton, CA 95231  
(209) 946-3400

### VA MODESTO OPC

1524 McHenry Blvd., Suite 315  
Modesto, CA 95350  
(209) 557-6200

### VA MONTEREY OPC

3401 Engineer Lane  
Seaside, CA 93955  
(831) 883-3800

### VA SAN JOSE OPC

80 Great Oaks Boulevard  
San Jose, CA 95119  
(408) 363-3011

### VA SONORA OPC

19747 Greenley Road  
Sonora, CA 95370  
(209) 588-2600

## VA NORTHERN CALIFORNIA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

### VA MARTINEZ OPC

150 Muir Road  
Martinez, CA 94553  
(925) 372-2000

### VA MEDICAL CENTER SACRAMENTO

10535 Hospital Way  
Mather, CA 95655-1200  
(916) 366-5366

### VA REDDING OPC

351 Hartnell Avenue  
Redding, CA 96002  
(530) 226-7555

### VA CHICO OPC

280 Cohasset Road  
Chico, CA 95926  
(530) 879-5000

### VA SACRAMENTO OPC

5342 Dudley Boulevard  
McClellan Park, CA 95652-1074  
(916) 561-7400

### VA MARE ISLAND OPC

201 Walnut Avenue  
Mare Island, CA 94592  
(707) 562-8200

### OAKLAND MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM

Oakland Army Base  
2505 West 14th Street  
Oakland, CA 94607  
(510) 587-3400

### VA OAKLAND OPC

2221 Martin Luther King Jr. Way  
Oakland, CA 94612  
(510) 267-7800

### VA FAIRFIELD OPC

103 Bodin Circle  
Travis AFB, CA 94535  
(707) 437-1800

## VA CENTRAL CALIFORNIA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

2615 E. Clinton Avenue  
Fresno, CA 93703-2286  
(559) 225-6100

### VA SOUTH VALLEY OPC

1050 North Cherry Street  
Tulare, CA 93274  
(559) 684-8703

### VA CASTLE OPC

3605 Hospital Road, Suite D  
Atwater, CA 95301-5140  
(209) 381-0105

## VA SIERRA NEVADA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

1000 Locust Street  
Reno, NV 89502-2597  
(775) 786-7200

### VA SIERRA FOOTHILLS OPC

3123 Professional Drive, Suite 250  
Auburn, CA 95603  
(530) 889-0872

### VA CARSON VALLEY OPC

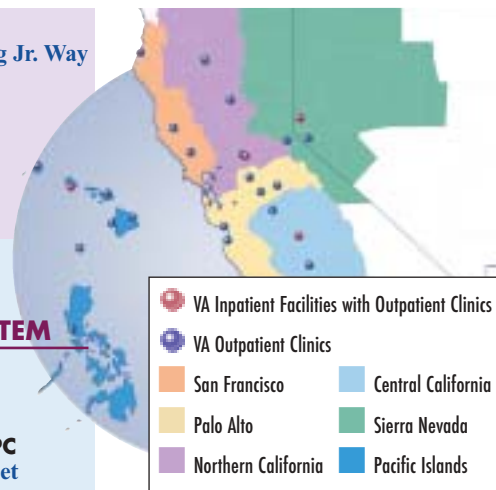
925 Ironwood Drive, Suite 2102  
Minden, NV 89423  
(888) 838-6256

## VA PACIFIC ISLANDS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

459 Patterson Road  
Honolulu, HI 96819  
(808) 433-1000

### VA HILO PTSD RESIDENTIAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

891 Ululani Street  
Hilo, HI 96720  
(808) 969-1684



### VA MAUI OPC

203 Ho'ohana Street, Suite 303  
Kahului, HI 96732  
(808) 871-2454

### VA HILO OPC

1285 Wai'anuenue Ave., Suite 211  
Hilo, HI 96720  
(808) 935-3781

### VA KONA OPC

75-5995 Kuakini Hwy., Suite 413  
Kailua-Kona, HI 96740  
(808) 329-0774

### VA KAUAI OPC

3367 Kuhio Hwy, Suite 200  
Lihue, HI 96766  
(808) 246-0497

### VA GUAM CLINIC

US Naval Hospital  
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## VA REGIONAL OFFICE & OUTPATIENT CENTER MANILA

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## Veterans' HealthMatters

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